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**Social Identity and Leadership in the Basque Region: A  
Study of Leadership Development Programmes**

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# **Social Identity and Leadership in the Basque Region: A Study of Leadership Development Programmes**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of the study is to explore how social identity influences the construction of leadership development programmes in the Basque Region. The Basque region is recognised as having a strong social and national identity (Kaufmann and Tödtling, 2000; McNeill, 2000). Historically leadership development has been focused on practising leaders and managers and delivered by universities, consultants and other intermediaries. A recent study undertaken by Olga Rivera has shown managerial dissatisfaction with current provision in the Basque Region and has illustrated a need for provision to focus on 'skills' for 'leadership'. What is meant by 'skills' and 'leadership' is, however, embedded within the Spanish language and identity of the region; as illustrated by the influence of the co-operative movement (Kasmir, 1996; Whyte, 1999). The paper introduces theories of social identity as they are applied to the study of leadership and it explores how theories of social identity can help explain perceptions of leadership in the Basque region.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper presents a story of an interesting research process, which struggled to work and shows how two narratives and one theory that seemed logical to fit together were in fact distinct and not easily linked. It will explain the problems encountered and identify why these problems occurred, as well as, highlight the outcomes of the effort. The paper originated from collaboration between Anne Murphy and Olga Rivera where they sought to introduce new methods of leadership development into the Basque region. The origins of the paper came from discussions about the nature of identity and how it influenced perceptions of leadership. These discussions led the team to investigate social identity and leadership behaviour in the Basque region exploring existing data collected by Olga that focused on management development programmes in the region. The regional study was similar to that carried out by the Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership (CEML) in the UK, examining management development education. One factor was however very different, the word leadership was never mentioned, while in the UK study the concept of leadership was central. These differences led the team to ask why in two European studies focusing on management development, leadership could be considered essential as a concept in one while hardly featuring as an issue in another. This paper consequently reports the process of the research. It does so by presenting two dialogues and by explaining how these dialogues while paradigmatically different lead to a similar conclusion about leadership in the Basque region. A number of outcomes are reported in this paper:

- i) In the research process the concept of social identity was found to be insufficient for explaining certain aspects of national identity
- ii) The entire concept of 'leadership' was found to be problematic when applied to the Basque region
- iii) The idea of multi-paradigm research was found to be a useful but challenging approach

In the next part of the paper we will introduce current theories and ideas on social identity and explain how they are considered to impact on leadership.

### **SOCIAL IDENTITY AND LEADERSHIP**

Identity is an essential concept in social psychology and is one of its main concerns. The nature of identity has sparked many philosophical debates, not least the problematic distinction between personal and social identity (Deschamps and Devos, 1998). The term 'social identity' is used here to explain how individuals conceptualise themselves via reference to groups of which they are members, categorising their own place in society. 'Social identity' in the paper is consequently defined as:

*"...the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" Tajfel, 1972, p. 292.*

Research on identity has illustrated that individuals need a relatively safe sense of 'who they are' (Erez and Earley, 1993) and self-definitions based on group membership play an important role allowing individuals to set their personal identity in the context of others expectations (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Such self-definitions derive their value from the perceptions of others and by internalising these values individuals begin to construct a sense of self-worth based on collective values and meanings. In this understanding of identity there is more weight given to the 'self' concept, how the self is defined and conceptualised within groups (Hogg and Terry, 2000). The way individuals construct meanings describing themselves via self-categorisation consequently plays an important role in social identity theory (Hogg, 2001). The idea of self-categorisation evolves from Tajfel's and Turner's early work (Hogg and Terry, 2000). Social categorisation of self and others into 'in-group' and 'out-group' types requires the development of social prototypes that are used to define what is typical about being a member of a particular group (Reicher, Spears and Postmes, 1995). The idea of prototypes is used as a central feature of self-categorisation. The concept implies that as people draw together the

stereotypical attributes of groups they form representations of ideal members who most embody what is attractive about group membership. The characteristics representing these ideal forms become what is prototypical about a group and what makes it different from other groups (Hogg and Terry, 2000). Individuals become members of a group more or less so depending on the extent to which they identify with the social prototype as they perceive it. To identify with a group the individual may not necessarily work towards the goals of the group but must feel psychologically embedded within it (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

Individuals are members of many groups and they may define themselves as belonging to a social group while continuing to disagree with its prevailing values. In this sense membership is defined by identification rather than by loyalty. Leadership in social identity is consequently an emergent process whereby leaders emerge from a group because they are most prototypical of how the group sees itself (Hogg, 2001). In this sense leadership is about how individuals or factions use power within particular contexts in-order to set agendas, to define the identity of the group and use resources to achieve communal objectives (Hogg, 2001). Leaders are viewed as individuals who have more influence because they hold group prestige and can consequently exercise more power over how the group sees itself and how it decides what goals to set. The extent to which an individual is more prototypical of the group's ideal, has the ability to actively influence people and has more influence attributed to their behaviour by group members, is directly linked to their leadership influence. Social identity theory considers that as people more strongly identify with a group their leadership perceptions are more directly influenced by prototypicality. The more prototypical a person is the more likely they are to emerge as a leader (Hogg, 2001). Inter-group relations are also important because prototypes are determined by groups using comparisons and contrasts with other groups (Rabbie and Bekkers, 1978).

There are, however, many levels to social identity and many groups within which a person belongs. For example an individual can belong: to a work group; a sports team; a family; a church; a region and a nation. These multiple identities cause different forms of social construction to occur and to interact (Deschamps and Devos, 1998). In the concept of 'nation' there is a purpose given by belonging to a group within which one was born (Salazar, 1998). This can include a positive orientation towards a regional group within a nation, the attachment to a grouping that ignores geographical borders, a positive feeling toward a supra-national group, and/or a sense of belonging to a nation defined by geographical borders. The basis of national sentiment plays an important role in the construction of reality for groups

located within a 'nation'. This may be embedded via territoriality, culture, ethnicity or formalised via statehood (Salazar, 1998). National identity, however it is conceived, plays a crucial role in concepts of 'leadership' because of its impact on one's social identity. More importantly the perceptions of belonging that are located in various different hierarchies associated with 'nation' have an impact on how prototypical behaviour is conceived within groups. If 'leadership' behaviour is to emerge from the prototypical behaviours of groups, then its character will be defined by these hierarchies of identity and typically be quite different in character between different groups and between 'nations'. If social identity theory is correct the Basque 'national' identity should influence how 'leadership' is conceived within social groups and influence the prototypes that individuals use to explain social behaviour. Although the membership of different groups should allow for multiple prototypes there should also be common characteristics that are different from other 'national' prototypes of 'leadership'.

In the next part of the paper we will explore how social identity and national identity are intertwined and can influence perceptions of 'leadership'. The paper will proceed to explain how the Basque identity contradicts Anglo-Saxon notions of leadership and it will do so by exploring how 'leadership' is conceptualised within the Spanish language. The following section will contrast two narratives of 'leadership' behaviour, one from a positivist tradition and the other from an interpretive tradition. Finally we will explain the issues that presented themselves during this research process and explore why these occurred.

## **EXPLORING THE BASQUE IDENTITY**

The Basque Autonomous Community (C.A.V.), covering 7,300 square kilometres in the North West corner of Spain, is the most politically autonomous region in Europe. The 2.1 million people who live in the three provinces of Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa enjoy a standard of living above the European average. Unlike the devolved administrations of Scotland and Wales, the Basque Government raises its taxes directly. The two tiers of local government take 25% of this, 6.24% goes to Madrid in payment for defence, diplomacy and the royal family, and the rest remains with the regional government (Eusko Jauklaritza). The strong economy based on special steels, machine tools, automotive and increasingly telecoms is growing. The C.A.V. exudes economic optimism in spite of its political challenges<sup>1</sup>.

The historic Basque national territory of Euskadi (or the land where Basque is spoken) covers a much larger area and includes four other Basque speaking provinces, three of which are in France. However, it is the C.A.V. where the desire for

independence is strongest and the language both more visible and more embedded in the political and administrative fabric of society. A pre-historic language with no proven connection to the Indo-European family, Euskera is a highly inflected, grammatically complex, and particularly impenetrable language. This defining point of language, the historic claim over territory, and a strong sense of a unique national identity form the basis of a fierce drive for political and economic independence which has broad, if pluralistic, support.

Immediately after the dictatorship the picture was very different. During the political and economic transition (1976 – 1983) the Basque Country had an economy devastated by rapid de-industrialisation and active terrorism. The heavy engineering base of metal products, steel and ship building went into severe decline as the transition democracy began to dismantle the machinery of state-ownership and protectionism, a process which continued throughout the 1980s. At the same time, couched in the language of occupation and armed struggle, ETA intensified the pressure on the institutions of the state. In 1983, with Basque unemployment at 36% and an average GDP of 80% of the European average, the economic and political challenges facing the new Basque administration were complex. The contrast with the energy and optimism of 2003 is stark. Unemployment is now down to a structural level of 5% across the CAV and GDP is at 105% of the European average<sup>2</sup>.

So what's behind the turnaround and, in the context of this study, has it anything at all to do with leadership? This turned out to be a question which made no sense at all to the Basques. The word leadership appeared to have limited meaning within the Spanish and Basque languages and had limited value when linked to management development education.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this paper we present two narratives based on two separate studies in the Basque region. The first study took a predominately positivist approach, it was designed to review management development education exploring its supply and demand dynamics. The study was undertaken during 1999-2000 by the ESTE Business School from Deusto University and Sarriko Business School from the Basque Country University. Olga Riveria who writes the first narrative was directly involved with the project. The survey examined the educational needs of Basque managers and their access to management education and in many respects it was similar to that conducted by CEML in the UK. It sought to understand the nature of the demand for management education and to explore and explain how current

provision fulfilled the requirements of this demand. The study was a comprehensive review of management development education in the Basque region and included structured interviews with 1100 managers.

The second study was based on an interpretive approach to the subject of leadership in the Basque region which was conducted by Anne Murphy and she writes the second narrative. The study used an informal research process including face-to-face discussions, telephone interviews and secondary data, including newspapers and the Spanish Royal Language Academy. The study principally took a linguistic approach seeking to understand how people living in the Basque region conceptualised the idea of leadership. During the study Anne conducted discussions in Spanish with a large range of different people in her personal network, including students, managers (including within the Mondragon Group), university teachers, public administrators, members of the knowledge cluster and managers within enterprise organisations. As well as these discussions she held conversations with Basque speakers (principally friends and family). Most of the data were collected via notes and e-mails. In the discussions some key questions were used to start unstructured conversations. For example, what does leadership mean to you? I'm studying leadership in the Basque region in your view what is Basque leadership? Who would you highlight as an example of a Basque leader? As well as these, conversations and data based on them Anne's narrative draws on a detailed analysis of translated words between English, Spanish and the Basque language seeking to understand some of the linguistic issues associated with the concept of leadership.

The study reported here, therefore, presented an interesting challenge to the participants. It was designed to explore social identity in the Basque region and how this might impact on leadership development. As the study emerged, however, it became apparent that there were many limitations in the theory of social identity for explaining what we sought to understand. The authors also found paradigmatic questions about the nature of the knowledge being constructed that were not entirely compatible. Finally, we discovered that the concept of leadership regardless of which paradigm we used appeared quite problematic within a non-Anglo Saxon context. In the paper we progress by presenting the two narratives separately so that the paradigmatic issues associated are not circumvented and in the final section of the paper we conclude by explaining why this study has been useful. During the conclusion we will illustrate why some of the issues identified emerged and explain how current social identity theory limited our understanding of the subject. Finally we will explain why the concept of leadership is problematic in the Basque region.

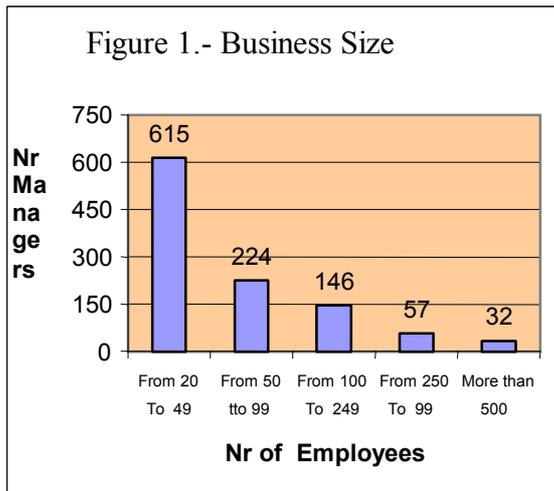
## **NARRATIVE ONE – THE POSITIVIST VIEWPOINT**

During 1999-2000 ESTE-Business School from Deusto University, and Sarriko Business School from the Basque Country University, conducted a broad survey about the educational needs that Basque managers had (Rivera et al. 2001). The main objective was to identify limitations on competitiveness that occurred because of access barriers to top management education, or to its inexistence in some specific topics. During the survey, the supply side was also analysed to detect their ability to adapt its offer to managers and to understand the strategic focus of management education in institutions.

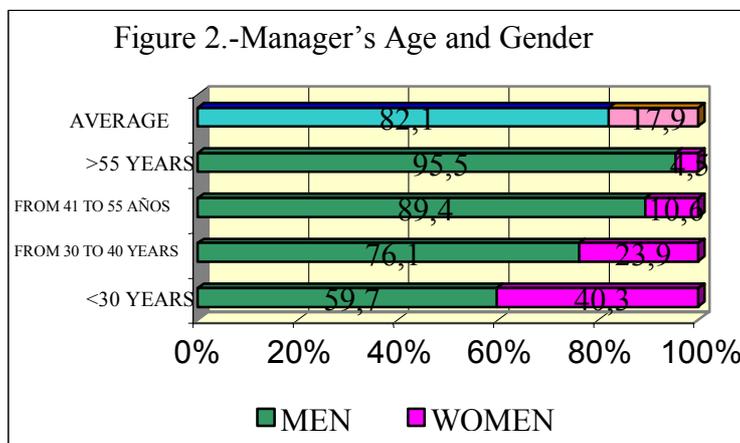
About 1100 managers from the top 2 hierarchical levels of the firm, or three top levels if the firm had a divisional structure, were interviewed during 2000 about:

- Their demographic and professional characteristics. Age, gender, number of years in managerial positions and number of years in their last post.
- The type of firm they worked in or were working in, including its: size, social form and activity.
- Their formal educational experience
- Their continuous educational experience including: the number of courses or educational activities they have attended in the last three years and some detailed information about the most effective activities
- Their future educational needs, trying to identify the origin of the need, the topic or area which they related their needs to, the way of achieving the provision of the course.
- The level of responsibility they hold for others education and management development training.

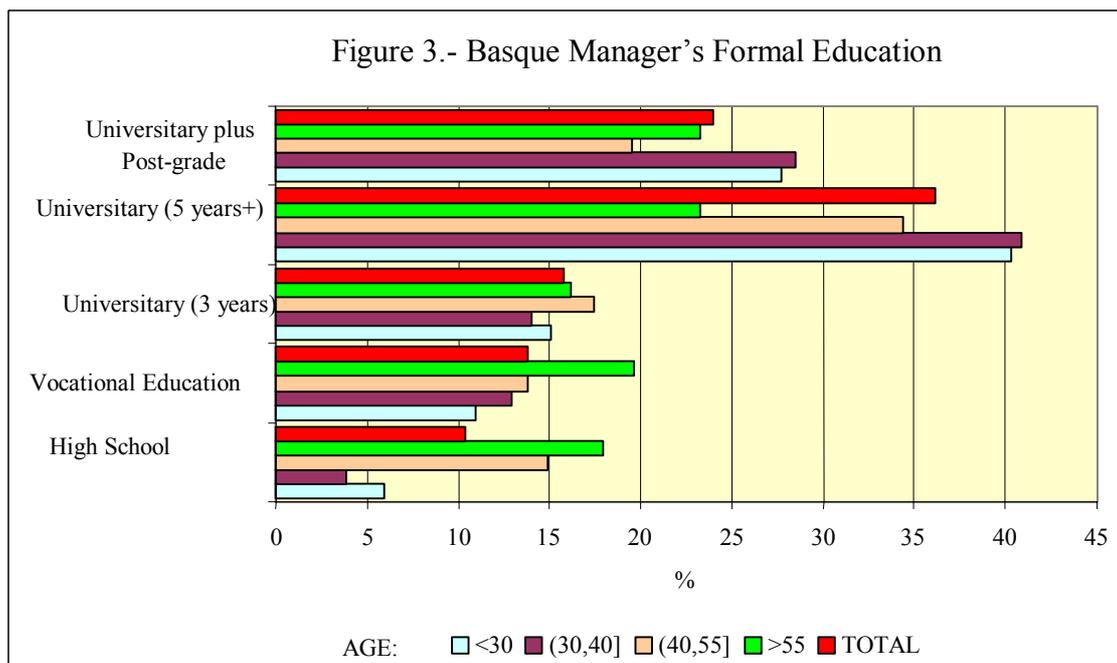
The sample was statistically representative of Basque firms. The average manager of our survey was carrying out his professional life in a manufacturing firm (63%) being a “Sociedad Anónima”<sup>3</sup> (70%) and with an average size of 45 workers. Figure 1 shows the number of managers interviewed by business size.



The Basque manager is more likely to be a man (82.1% of the cases) but this could be considered a consequence of the late incorporation of women into work in the Basque Country. Even if women have more power in the Basque Country than in the rest of Spain they haven't had legal equality to men until 1979<sup>4</sup>. As we can appreciate in Figure 3, we can find more women in managerial positions as age decreases. In fact, 40.3% of managers in their 20's and 24% of managers between 30 to 40 years are women.



Our survey shows that Basque managers are well educated which is very different from the 'self-made man' image usually associated with the Basque entrepreneurial stage of the 1950's and 1960's, when Basque industry started its growth. As we can see in Figure 3 in the lowest age category the most educated are managers. This is also a result of the increasing share of population that could have access to formal education from the late 1970's onwards. Almost 80% of the managers under 40 years have finished university studies.

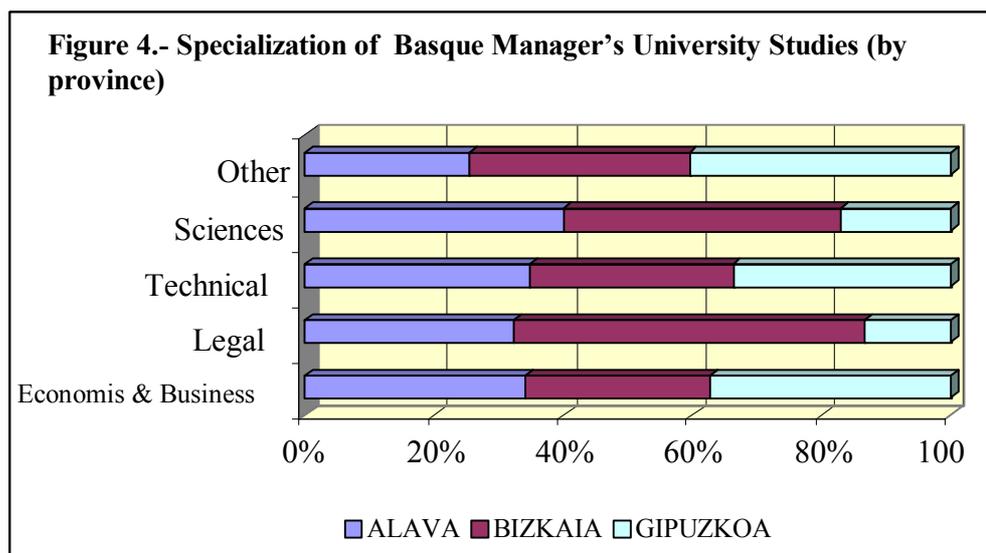


The Basque Country has always had a very strong industrial focus related to a technological culture, in the sense that Huber used it (Huber and Thurn, 1993). This technological culture can be appreciated in the kind of qualifications Basque managers had. Technical studies are the most frequent in older managers and also in top level managers (CEO's), even if they represent 35% compared with the 43% that have economic and business studies. This is also a consequence of the shift in the Basque education system over the last 20 years. The Basque Country has conducted economic studies since the start of 20<sup>th</sup> Century and La Comercial de Deusto- and Business Studies since the 1950's –ESTE, Universidad de Deusto- but the emergence of a powerful management culture doesn't start until the 1980's. Even if this shift to a management culture is proven the technical culture remains strong and can still be seen in the younger generations of university students.

Table 1.- Relative Weight of Basque Country over Spain (2001)	%
Total population	5,11%
Potential universitaire population	4,73%
Registered at University	4.78%
Registered at Degrees (Licenciaturas, Diplomaturas)	4.66%
Registered at technical studies	5.36%
Registered at Economic and Business Studies	7.89%
Registered at Technical Studies related with Business (Industrial and Information)	21.33%

Source: Rivera (2003), from EUSTAT and INE data

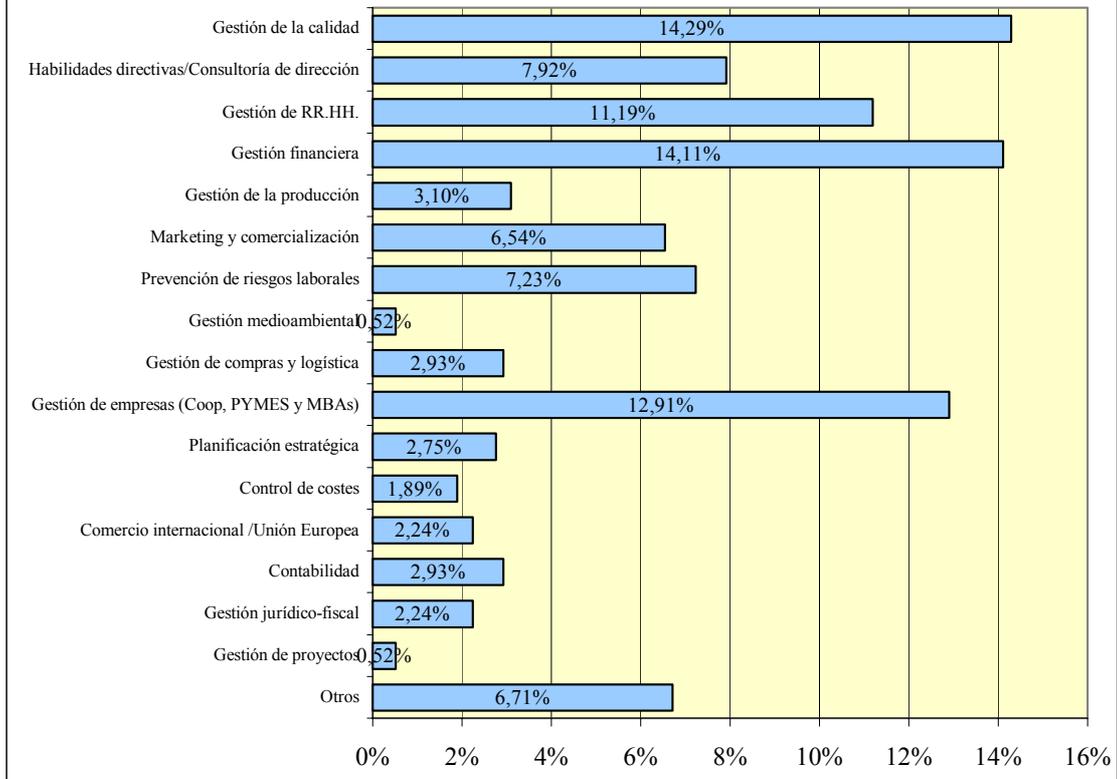
As we can see in Table 1, Basque students represent more than a 21% of the Spanish students registered in 2001 in the technical university education specifically oriented to business activity. Even if we open the technical scope to other types it goes down to a 5%, which is the average Basque weight of population. We can also state that Basque students of economic and business studies represent 2 percentage points more than the average. This data confirms the impact of the 'entrepreneurial culture' within the Basque region when compared to other Spanish regions.



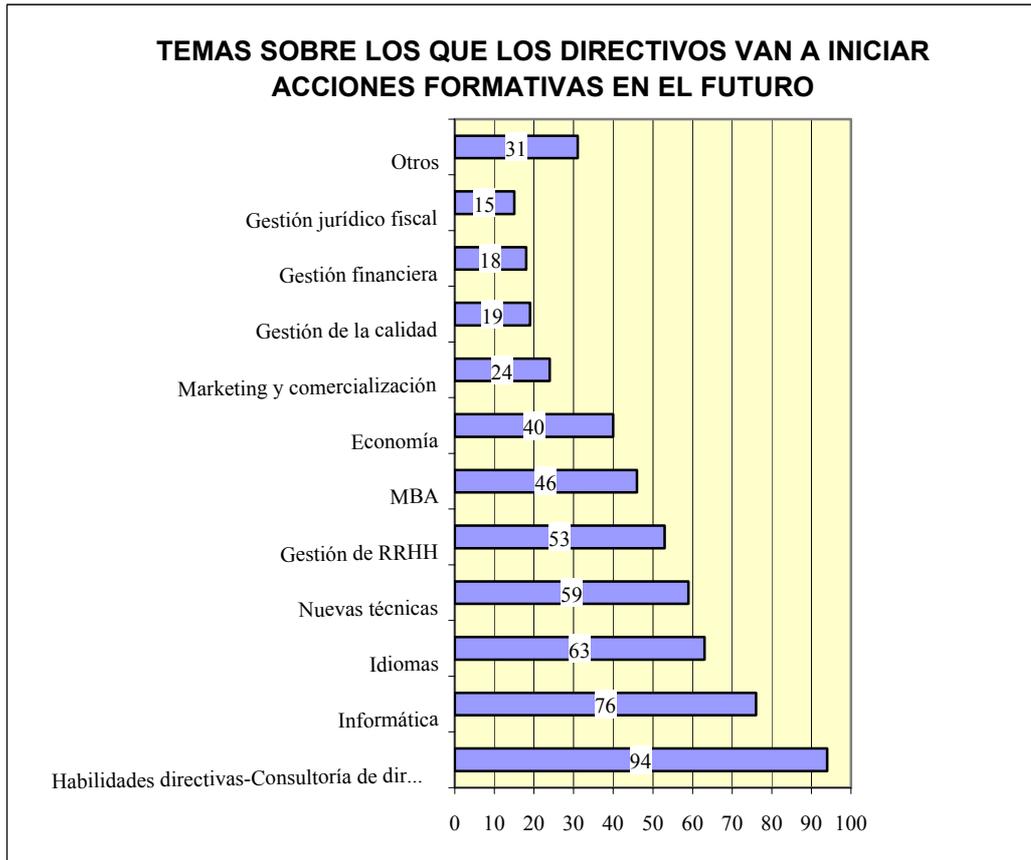
Finally, analysing the managers' education in each province, we find very different situations. Figure 4 shows, a different reality for each province. Gipuzkoa is more small business and industrial oriented and has one of the highest percentages of economists and engineers. Bizkaia has a more large business and financial orientation and has a high percentage of managers that are lawyers and scientists. Alava the province that historically has been agricultural but is also the headquarters of the Basque Government since the 1980's, has a very balanced educational participation, with almost the same specific weight of science, technical, economic and legal studies.

In our survey, when we asked managers to describe the most positive program they had undertaken in the last 3 years we obtain this distribution: Finance, Quality and General Management Courses were ranked highest. Human Resources and Managerial Skills were ranked in the second group, mentioned only 11% and 7.9% of the cases respectively. Leadership, which has been grouped within managerial skills was only mentioned 3 times of 1074 answers.

### CURSOS VALORADOS DE FORMA MÁS POSITIVA



When we asked the same group of managers about their future development needs, their answers show the increasing importance of managerial skills picked up via group activities. Going to the specific answers we find that leadership is not quoted spontaneously by any manager in a study of 1074 managers.



From the empirical study on management development education in the Basque region there are a number of key points that allow us to introduce the next narrative. Firstly, the Basque region has a history of an ‘entrepreneurial culture’, which is supported in the survey. This culture is embedded in its identity and is both politicised and historically essential for region’s development. As entrepreneurial organisations have expanded and grown in the region it has developed a more professional and educated workforce that engages in many types of management and management education. What is most surprising about this study when compared to its UK equivalent (CEML) is the lack of any awareness about ‘leadership’ both as an existing skill within management (mentioned 3 times in 1074 answers) and as a future management development requirement (0 in 1074 answers). The obvious question is why? Why in the UK has the concept of leadership become so central to the debate about management development education and within the Basque region has been so evidently irrelevant? The researchers were led to consider that it might have something to do with social identity and meaning within different cultural contexts. The second narrative pursues an explanation for this discontinuity.

## **NARRATIVE TWO – THE INTERPRETIVE VIEWPOINT**

While identification with Basque territory and with Euskera is strong, there is no agreement as to what constitutes “Basque” identity. Who does or does not qualify to be defined as “Basque” depends, above all, on who is doing the defining. This is illustrated by the current debate in the newspaper “El Mundo” which focuses on the difference between Basque nationality and Basque citizenship. This debate has been fuelled by the so called “plan Ibarretxe” and is the subject of heated political discussion throughout Spain. Ibarretxe of the “ruling” Basque National Party (PNV) and the president of the Basque Government, is spearheading a constitutional process towards the declaration of nationhood (including the issuing of Basque passports) without the consent of Madrid. Nationality and citizenship in the context of this debate are far more complex than simply the place of birth. Many second generation immigrants from other areas of Spain, while born and brought up in the Basque Country may neither seek nor qualify for Basque nationality.

The constant social struggle to occupy a meaningful cultural space is further complicated in the crowded political arena of the C.A.V by the sheer complexity of the narratives of power and identity. The ongoing construction and re-construction of contemporary Basque identity is openly contested between groups with widely differing degrees of institutional power. The stakes in this negotiation are particularly high. To take just one example, how the local business community currently takes up and lives out a sense of Basque identity is mediated on the one hand by almost obligatory individual party political allegiances, and on the other by ETA’s “pay up or get out” demands for financial contribution to the cause<sup>5</sup>. In order to examine the impact of national identity on conceptualisations of leadership, we need to be very clear about whose version of national identity we mean.

Regarding the “nested” identities and social groups argument in social identity theory, the business and management group who we are interested in, have a broad range of potential identities at their disposal, and these are defined not within the Basque space, but beyond its boundaries (the Basque Country and Spain, the EU, Europe etc). I’m not sure about the influence of prototypical patterns of behaviour in this sense – it may well be that well received and successful managers (leaders?) simply sell more fridges. You refer to Mondragon and the influence of the co-operatives. Recently the way their influence was explained to me was that the Basque Country has the best business schools in the world – Mondragon. So many people have been through their hands and it is possible that they learn their management practices related to democratic corporate governance. In Mondragon

they often refer to their unique management style but it is a style they refer to as Basque, not co-operative. The same descriptions are used by managers outside the group and by the government. Surprisingly enough, as I was checking the Basque Govt's web<sup>6</sup> today to see how to spell "government" in Basque, there are the same descriptors scrolling up before my eyes. They see themselves as "serios" (serious, hard working etc), "solidarios" (an adjective and probably whole value set that we can't access because we can only say "solidarity") and "emprendedores" (enterprising).

The important point to make about social identity is that the way the Basques describe their successes to themselves is with reference to their culture and its values, not to the quality (or even presence) of leadership. This doesn't do a great deal for the theory of social identity or prototypicality and even less for the concept of leadership.

When I asked a local manager/director/leader ("directivo") how he understood the word "leadership" in the context of the firm (la empresa) he said it means a particular kind of manager, a "new" more open one, who mobilises people and gets them to commit to a vision. I think they're using it (in the management and business world) as one fragment of what a manager is and should do, a competence for the checklist, but then, is it so very different in the UK?

Then there's a whole load of stuff about the changing nature and composition of social groups which relates to the dominant industries and educational possibilities both of which have changed dramatically over the past 20 years. Olga's study will no doubt show this; the engineers, 40 plus, will be seeking different learning experiences from the bright young things who study "Empresariales" or management studies. As we have seen from the reference to "solidario" as a core signifier for "Basque" business and management success, the field of management is a bit of a minefield for translators. Some of the key terms in Spanish ("empresario" "emprendedor", "directivo", gestion) have no direct and easy translations into English. "Empresario" is business person, employer or entrepreneur depending on the context; "emprendedor" is an adjective close to "enterprising"; a "directivo" is usually a senior manager and "gestion" is the activity of management. Of course this works the other way round, key concepts in the Anglo-Saxon texts of management and leadership sit uneasily with the current Spanish reality as expressed in language<sup>7</sup>. The interest in "entrepreneurship" both as an academic discipline and political agenda, has meant that a way of translating it has had to be more or less invented. "Emprendizaje" still sounds odd to Spanish ears. Moreover, in the context of our

exploration of the social and cultural construction of “leadership”, the word “leader” is particularly problematic. While there are many active ways of describing the activities of individuals in relation to groups, many of which translate back into English as “ leader”, the Spanish word “lider” does not appear in the dictionary until 1970 (ref. La Real Academia etc). Leadership (“liderazgo”) is a new comer to the world of business and management and appears very infrequently, if at all in the Basque Country. I am not a Basque speaker so trying to draw any conclusions about the relationship between social identity and language used (in Basque) is bound to be limited. Nevertheless it is worth pointing out the ‘knowledge clusters’ recent dictionary publication. 50 of the most common management terms in English have been carefully translated into Basque and compared with their Spanish and French translations. In this publication ‘leader’ in English and ‘lider’ in Spanish is translated into Basque as ‘lider’ (interestingly the French is translated as ‘leader’). When I interviewed a member of the team responsible for writing the dictionary, he told me that when it came to ‘leadership’ they more or less had to invent it<sup>8</sup>.

When concluding this narrative there are some important points highlighted that would not be accessible had an interpretive approach not been used. We used an interpretive approach to try to understand why the concept of leadership was not recognised as being important by managers for management development education. The interpretive study shows that the Basque ‘identity’ is currently open to ongoing negotiation between a range of actors and that it is culturally and politically complicated. In the study we found a recurring problem, when individuals were asked what they thought leadership meant within the Basque region they were perplexed and often replied: ‘we don’t use that’; ‘we don’t understand what they (Anglo-Saxon) mean’; ‘we don’t mean that, we use directivo’. The term even when translated carefully into a Spanish equivalent lacks meaning within the Basque context. As a further illustration a number of University lecturers in the study reported that students struggle to interpret requests to explain their leadership skills when applying for jobs in multi-national corporations. They often ask ‘what should I write’; ‘what does it mean’ and are quite often embarrassed to put themselves before others because it contradicts their sense of ‘solidarios’. These examples show that the social identity of the Basque region is embedded in its social, cultural and linguist history. Concepts such as leadership which do not originate from this identity have little meaning and alternative concepts, which are not direct replacements, have more worth in understanding how managers might behave and the type of management development education that will work.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion we will focus on the three issues that were raised in the introduction. Concentrating on: the usefulness of social identity theory; problems associated with the concept of leadership; and, some of the challenges encountered when trying to develop multi-paradigm study.

Concepts of social identity have proven to be both useful and problematic when seeking to understand leadership in the Basque region. The concept of social identity, how groups construct meaning and develop prototypes has been particularly useful in allowing this study to view the prototypes of Basque management behaviour in a way that is embedded in their context and construction of behaviour (Hogg, 2001). That prototypes emerge through self-categorisation was found to exist in much of the study, as Basque managers used prototypes and constructed language to represent the roles they considered important in management (Hogg and Terry, 2000). The roles they constructed are quite different from Anglo-Saxon notions of leadership. Evidence supporting this point can be found throughout the second narrative where Anne Murphy describes the type of words used in the Spanish language that could have some association with leadership (“empresario” “emprededor”, “directivo”, gestion) while showing that term ‘lider’, which is most equivalent to the English ‘leader’, has little meaning in the Basque context. Likewise the evidence from Olga’s study shows that the term is not particularly recognised as having any conceptual value for managers when they are thinking about their professional development requirements. The concepts of self-categorisation and prototypes were consequently useful for understanding the construction of these roles in the Basque context and for understanding how these roles differed conceptually.

When theories of social identity begin to explore ‘leadership’, however, they appear to become somewhat more limited (Hogg, 2001). This occurs because as groups construct prototypes they also construct language and meaning to share their understanding of these prototypes (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Conceptualisations of ‘leader’ and ‘led’ are themselves prototypes embedded in a social reality representing a group’s social identity. Consequently, the concept of ‘solidarios’ has a more profound influence in the Basque region than leadership and groups are more inclined to build prototypes based on cooperation than to push forward an individual as a leader who is most prototypical of the group. The ultimate

question that the study raises is that the Basque Country has clearly been able to achieve a great deal over recent years without reference to the notion of 'leadership'. Why then does this notion have such currency in the UK context and is it as important as currently perceived?

This question and the results of this study have important implications both directly for the participants in the research process and more widely. Collaborative work between Deusto and Lancaster is seeking to build outreach relationships that 'transfer' knowledge about learning and learning design to leaders/managers/entrepreneurs in the region. What this work illustrates is that the idea of introducing certain forms of management development education from one region into another is far more complex than is commonly recognised. Social identity plays an important role in allowing us to understand how certain programmes and approaches may be understood and used differently from what is originally intended. It also provides access to information on the way management and leadership practice in the region is embedded in the region's identity. Consequently, the work illustrates that management and leadership theory and development practice comes out of and makes sense in a specific time and place, linked to issues of power and identity. To truly understand management development in the Basque Country one must construct and understand programmes that work within the boundaries of their social identity. It is not sufficient to simply transport concepts of leadership or leadership programmes to the region or to commodify knowledge based in one context and apply it to another.

When one recognises the contextual and socially constructed nature of leadership, it inevitably leads to some important questions for future study and policy making in the UK.

- Why are we so enthralled with the leadership concept here?
- Have we commoditised our concepts of behaviour?
- If we continue to de-contextualise concepts and practices in training and development do they become irrelevant within local contexts?
- If the conceptualisation of leadership, in social constructionist terms, can be so completely different between geographic regions can it not also differ considerably between organisations?

- Would some of the UK leadership initiatives be more successful if they were more careful to understand the historical, social and cultural context of each place where 'leadership' was somehow expected to make a difference?

Although some of these questions have undoubtedly been addressed elsewhere in the leadership literature they raise interesting points for the future development of Basque management development programmes. As the relationship develops between Deusto and Lancaster some of these research questions will be explored in greater depth.

Before concluding the paper entirely we must also comment on the challenges of multi-paradigm research as they presented themselves in this study. The team sought to bring together two studies. One from a positivist tradition and one from an interpretive tradition and we sought to create a link between these two approaches via the use of social identity theory. Only the reader can judge whether or not this was achieved. From our point of view this paper has been a considerable challenge and there were points where it might not have worked at all. Ultimately multi-paradigm research is interesting because it brings together very different perspectives on the same phenomenon. It was challenging because these perspectives are not compatible in all senses and, therefore, they are not easily co-located. In the case of this study creating a structure for the paper that worked proved difficult.

We believe the benefits of multi-paradigm research do, however, outweigh these challenges. In this study one gained access to a comprehensive analysis of the supply and demand characteristics of Basque management development programmes which highlighted empirically that the concept of leadership did not appear important to Basque managers in the way that it would in the UK. Following this with an interpretive approach allowed the team to gain much more detailed insight into why this might be the case. Consequently, a multi-paradigm approach worked in the end because it allowed the team to see that taking either paradigmatic approach led to the same conclusion – that the concept of 'leadership' simply did not make sense in another region's 'social identity'. Based on this conclusion and from a practical point of view it was found that management development programmes based on the concept of 'leadership' needed to be careful to recognise the contextual challenges involved when introducing them within the Basque Country and should be designed with the social identity of Basque managers and their social reality in mind.

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<sup>1</sup> All the Basque data <http://www.spri.es/web2/cas/>

<sup>2</sup> There are other figures about industry mix (42% industry, 56% services (22% of which is industry based) and 2% agriculture. Also total GDP @ 31 billion US - quoted in: "Basque Country: the knowledge Cluster" Angel Arbonies and Monica Moso. *Journal of Knowledge management*, Vol 6 No 4 2002

<sup>3</sup> A limited company

<sup>4</sup> We have to remember that Franco died in 1975. At the moment, women could not have business or commercial activities without parents or husband permission. Legal conditions take almost 5 years to be changed.

<sup>5</sup> About ETA and the revolutionary tax: "La precariedad de ETA" *El pais*, domingo 19 de octubre 2003

<sup>6</sup> The Basque Govt website is [http://www.euskadi.net/home/indice800\\_c.htm](http://www.euskadi.net/home/indice800_c.htm)

<sup>7</sup> On the word leader in Spanish is from La Real Academia <http://www.rae.es/>

<sup>8</sup> "Enpresa Kudeaketa Aurreratua, Hitztegia", Cluster Conocimiento, PMP Editoriala, Bilbao, 2003